My understanding of Sri Madbhagavad Gita - Sequencing of Chapters

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As we all know, Bhagavad Gita has its origin in Mahabharata which is a vast treatise with about one lakh Slokas. According to Maharshi Veda Vyasa, the author and compiler of the Mahabharata, the epic contains everything that can be known about life, including dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (pleasure), and moksha (salvation). In essence, the Mahabharata is a vast repository of knowledge, a guide to life, and a reflection of the human experience, all woven into a compelling narrative.

I am intrigued by three important aspects of spirituality/philosophy (Adhyatmikata) expounded in this magnum opus. The first one is the Yaksha-Yudhistirasamvadamdescribed in Aranyaparvam. The second is the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is found in the Bhishma Parva, the sixth book of the Mahabharata. It appears as a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna within chapters 23-40 of the Bhishma Parva. The third one is Vishnusahasranamam that was preached by Bhishma to Yudhistira and his brothers in AnuSasikaparvam which isof post-war incident. These cover, in my view, the three aspects of adhyatmikata.

In Yaksha-Yudhistirasamvadam, the Yaksha posed around hundred questions that were deeply related to life and spirituality. Yudhistira, even though in a very grim state of mind seeing all his brothers almost died, and in all modesty said without losing his equanimity, that he would answer the questions to the best of his ability; and he gave out the most esoteric knowledge of spirituality. Some scholars say that the essential ideas embodied in Bhagavad Gita have roots in Yaksha-yudhistirasamvadam.

While Yaksha-Yudhistirasamvadam is very esoteric, Vishnusahasranamam is a text of simplicity in relationship with God. This shows the ingenuity of Maharshi Veda Vyasa who discusses wide-range of spirituality in myriad dimensions in one single book Mahabharata.

Bhagavad Gita falls somewhere in between - neither as direct as in Vishnusahasranamam, nor asesoteric as in Yaksha-Yudhistirasamvadam.Some people say Bhagavad Gita is an ocean of knowledge. Instead of assigning many adjectivesto appreciate Bhagavad Gita, I view Bhagavad Gita as an anthology of knowledge that is given outin a simplified, elegant and direct form and is supposed to be known to and understood by allhuman beings. Bhagavad Gita has a unique feature that it was propounded directly by the GodAlmighty Himself. Many Avadhoots, or messengers of God gave many spiritual texts; butBhagavad Gita is the song coming out from God directly, for our benefit. At the same time, we should refrain from treating this sacred book as the one giving effective management and other material lessons. For that there is other literature. We should show our reverence and obeisance to this holy scripture as it flowed directly from the lips of that Great One.

Bhagavad Gita is compiled in eighteen chapters and in over seven hundred Slokas. I tried to analyse all these eighteen chapters in a certain way. I am not here to impose my interpretations;because, personally I feel, each of us has to understand it directly, in a way that is uniquelysuitable to us. There has to be direct link between the God Almighty and the disciple. Going intoelaborate explanations, as somebody mentioned as pravachanas, or by any via-media, might addpersonal biases, and sometimes the original meaning might be lost. To put it

interestingly, *'whereis the wisdom which has been lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge which has been lost inthe information? Where is the information which has been lost in the internet*?' The essence issomewhere hidden. It takes aeons to capture the essence. I would rather look at Bhagavad Gitaas a direct link between the God and the disciple.

The eighteen Adhyayas of the celestial song Sri Madbhagavad Gita may be divided into three levels of discourse.

The first level covers Adhyayas 1 to 9. In these Adhyayas we see Arjuna in a questioning mood. He is trying to assess the Lord's ability to answer all his queries. For His part, Lord Krishna is alsoapprising Arjuna's credentials for his suitability to learn the most sacred Book of knowledge directly from Lord Himself. It is only towards the end of Adhyaya 9, Lord is satisfied about Arjuna's sincerity, devotion and his eagerness to learn.

It is also interesting to see that the eighteen chapters are arranged in a certain orderly sequence.The very first adhyaya, or chapter is Arjuna Vishada Yoga. I give lot of importance to this chapter.I feel much indebted to Arjuna, because he raised such questions that Srikrishna had toelaborately give all this knowledge in Bhagavad Gita. Unless Arjuna was what he was in thebeginning of the war, we could not have got the benefit of teachings of the God. The best way tograsp Bhagavad Gita is, I feel, to visualise that we are seated in the same chariot with Arjuna and Srikrishna, amidst 18 akshouhinis of the army. We should imagine as to what was the mental state of Arjuna. He was so sure of winning that he was thinking what would happen if he killed hisrelatives who were on the other side. He was also visualising far into future and asking thequestions accordingly. That is why he was called Dheerodaatta (One who can look far into future, visulaise and analyse consequences resulting due to actions of that time); and not Dheerodatta (one who repents and broods on the consequences after they occur). We get lotof clarity when we visualise ourselves in the place of Arjuna and mentally become Arjuna! Thefirst chapter is mainly about Arjuna's feelings and questions.The second chapter is the Sankhya Yoga. This chapter has 72 Slokas. This is quite long, consideringwhole Gita of 18 chapters is around 700 Slokas. In so far as the content is concerned, SankhyaYoga is like executive summary to the whole book. Almost all topics covered in the other sixteenchapters are touched upon in some form or the other in this chapter of Sankhya Yoga. In thischapter the conversation between Arjuna and Srikrishna is wonderful. Srikrishna tested Arjuna tothe core. He did not simply dole out the knowledge. When he was sure that Arjuna is capable ofreceiving the knowledge, then only went ahead giving out the knowledge. Even among the 72slokas I like a particular sloka:

क्रोधाद्भवतिसम्मोहःसम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद्बुद्धिनाशोबुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति॥ २-६३॥

We all know the meaning of this Sloka: From anger delusion set in; from delusion confusion ofmemory seeps in; confusion of memory leads to loss of reason; and loss of reason results incomplete ruin. This Sloka has high applicability in our day-to-day life.

From Sankhya Yoga, he goes to Karma Yoga, then to Gnaga Yoga, Karma sanyasa Yoga, Atma Samyama Yoga, Vignana Yoga, Akshara parabrahma Yoga, Raja vidya Raja Guhya Yoga, VibhootiYoga, ViswaroopaSandarsana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Kshaetrakshaetragna Yoga, GunatrayaVibhagaYoga, Purushottama Prapti Yoga, DaivasuraSampadvibhaga Yoga, SraddhatrayaVibhaga Yoga, andlastly, Mokshasanyasa Yoga. I am always intrigued why the

names are given in this sequence. Forexample, why, Bhakti Yoga which is always referred to as the easiest path towards God is described in the 12th adhyaya? What is the reason for not keeping it, for example, in the third adhyaya itself or for that matter at any other place?

Now coming to the sequence of the chapters, my understanding is like this: after the second chapter which is the summary of the whole Gita, the immediate next chapter is Karma Yoga. This is about action. Right from ancient times, say Vedic times, they always said 'first do your ownwork properly'. That is how Karma Yoga must have come in the beginning. After going ahead with performing our actions, we evolve to the extent of being ready for wisdom. This is how GnanaYoga had come after the Karma Yoga. After we attain wisdom, now God says you have to renounce the fruits of action, in Karma sanyasa Yoga. This is because, though Karma has its own value, we should come out of it in order to have a holistic view of God. This needs Karma sanyasam or renunciation of action and its fruits, in short. When one is asked to do the action earnestly andalso to renounce it, one is put into a great dilemma. Hence the need comes of Atma samyamaYoga, for achieving mental equilibrium. This is something Arjuna felt is very difficult to achieve. In this 6thadhyaya of Atma samyama yoga, wonderful discussion between Srikrishna and Atjuna clearly brings out our own dilemmas, and approach to understanding the God Almighty. In fact, Arjuna expresses very clearly:

योऽयंयोगस्त्वयाप्रोक्तःसाम्येनमधुसूदन।
एतस्याहंनपश्यामिचञ्चलत्वात्स्थितिंस्थिराम्॥६-३३॥

Arjun said: The system of Yog that you have described so kindly and with clarity, O Madhusudana, I am not able to comprehend due to the restless mind.

Like Arjuna, all of us go through this stage of ever wandering and wavering mind.

चञ्चलंहिमनःकृष्णप्रमाथिबलवद्दृढम्।
तस्याहंनिग्रहंमन्येवायोरिवसुदुष्करम्॥६-३४॥

The mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate, O Krishna!Just like the wind cannot be controlled, it appears to me that mind is also it is very difficult to control.

We can easily sympathize with Arjuna. He, in fact, echoing our feelings about controlling the mind to realise concentration.

Let us also hear what the Lord has to say.

श्रीभगवानुवाच।
असंशयंमहाबाहोमनोदुर्निग्रहंचलम्।
अभ्यासेनतुकौन्तेयवैराग्येणचगृह्यते॥६-३५॥

Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but, by practice and by dispassion it may be restrained!

Thus, the secret and key are to practise and practise unwaveringly with determination!

असंयतात्मनायोगोदुष्प्रापइतिमेमतिः।
वश्यात्मनातुयतताशक्योऽवाप्तुमुपायतः॥६-३६॥

Yog is difficult to attain for one whose mind is unbridled. However, those who have learnt to control the mind, and who strive earnestly by proper means, can attain perfection in Yog.

Another small diversion to Sri Vishnu sahastanamam to realise the Lord. One of the names of Lord Vishnu in Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram is a beautiful nameAdhokshaja (अधोक्षज). It is the 417thname in stanza 44.

वैकुंठःपुरुषःप्राणःप्राणदःप्रणवःपृथुः।
हिरण्यगर्भःशत्रुघ्नोव्याप्तोवायुरधोक्षजः।।44।

There are many interpretations and anubhavams of erudite scholars and saints. One of theinterpretations (I should say the anubhavam) given by Adi Sankara for the Name'Adhokshaja' He who is perceived when the sense organs (akshagaNa-s) are made inward-looking, isAdhokhaja.

Please look inwardly to perceive what you want to be!Please look inwardly to perceive the Lord. When the former is possible there should not be any iota of doubt that the latter is not possible!In 6thAdhyaya of Bhagavad-Gita (Atmasamyama Yoga), there is an interesting debate between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, which is very pertinent to experience Paramatma. It involves quite an ordeal of controlling one's mind. Sri Krishna says:

शनैः शनैरुपरमेद्बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।
आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥६-२५॥

Gradually, step by step, one should fix the mind on self alone, should think of nothing else and aim at achieving quietude.

यतो यतो निश्चलति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।
ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत्॥६-२६॥

From wherever the mind wanders due to its flickering and unsteady nature, one must certainlywithdraw it and bring it back under the control of the Self.

Sri Krishna emphsises on constant practice with dedication and commitment and then only realizing Adhokshaja inwardly would become possible.

Once the mind is in equilibrium, one becomes fit foranalytical interpretation of Gnanam, which is called Vignanam. Here comes the need for VignanaYoga (7thadhyaya). There is one beautiful sloka that may be considered as essence of Srimdbhagavatam.

योयोयांयांतनुंभक्तःश्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति।
तस्यतस्याचलांश्रद्धांतामेवविदधाम्यहम्॥७-२१॥

Whatever celestial form a devotee seeks to worship with faith, I steady the faith of such a devotee in that form.

This preaching of the Lord is very crucial and important

Once the mind becomes analytical in its approach, its ability to perceive can be extrapolated toappreciate the essence of non-perishability of the God Almighty i.e., Akshara Parabrahmam.

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।
यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥ ८-१३॥

Uttering that eternal and monosyllable Om (the supreme combination of letters) —the Brahman—remembering Me always, he whodeparts thus, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal.

Hence the eighth chapter is called Akshara Parabrahma Yoga. The next natural step is the RajaVidya Raja Guhya Yoga which leads us into the secret zones of spiritual knowledge. In the lastSloka of the ninth chapter, Srikrishna says,

मन्मनाभवमद्भक्तोमद्याजीमांनमस्कुरु।
मामेवैष्यसियुक्त्वैवमात्मानंमत्परायणः॥९-३४॥

Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisancesto Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.

We willcome back to this Sloka later. Afterwords, the level of questioning of Arjuna which he did fromthe first chapter to the ninth chapter gets mellowed down. God realises that this is the rightmoment to give Arjuna the myriad ways to perceive God in the mortal world. This is how VibhootiYoga (10thadhyaya) came.

The second level Srimadbhagavad Gita covers Adhyayas 10 to 15. The Lord presents before Arjuna His innumerablemanifestations in this universe and it is only at the beginning of Adhyaya 11 that we see the mellowing of Arjuna. Srikrishna needed ten adhyayas for bringing realisation in Arjuna, who is a Kshatriya (warrior prince) and whodoes not bow down easily. After seeing the mellowed Arjuna, the Lord Srikrishna grants him ViswaroopaSandarsanam in the11thadhyaya. Then Arjuna makes absolute surrender.

मदनुग्रहायपरमंगुह्यमध्यात्मसंज्ञितम्।
यत्त्वयोक्तंवचस्तेनमोहोऽयंविगतोमम॥११ -१॥

Arjuna said: Oh Lord, only by Your mercy, has this most hidden and secret spiritual experience of reliasing you been revealed to me. My ignorance of Your supreme nature has now been completely dispelled.

Then only Bhakti Yoga starts; not till then. This is how Bhakti Yoga is placed all the way in thetwelfth chapter. Arjuna had to pass through all previous stages of learning, realisation andcomprehension of subtilty to reach Bhakti-Yoga.

It is also interesting to note that Lord Srikrishna, ever willing to help and guide us mortals, lists step-wise ‘procedure’ to attain Bhakti. In fact, he summarises some of the previous chaptersinto single slokas to preach us the route to attain Bhakti

मय्येवमनआधत्स्वमयिबुद्धिंनिवेशय।
निवसिष्यसिमय्येवअतऊर्ध्वंनसंशयः॥१२-८॥

Fix your mind on Me only, place your intellect in Me; then, (thereafter) you shall, no doubt, live in Me alone.

अथचित्तंसमाधातुंनशक्नोषिमयिस्थिरम्।
अभ्यासयोगेनततोमामिच्छाप्तुंधनञ्जय॥१२-९॥
If you are unable to fix your mind steadily upon Me, then by the YOGA -of constant-practice, seek to reach Me, O Dhananjaya.

अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसिमत्कर्मपरमोभव।
मदर्थमपिकर्माणिकुर्वन्सिद्धिमवाप्स्यसि॥१२-१०॥
If you are unable even to practise ABHYASA-YOGA, be you intent on performing actions for My sake; even by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.

अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसिकर्तुंमद्योगमाश्रितः।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागंततःकुरुयतात्मवान्॥१२-११॥
If you are unable to do even this, then taking refuge in Me, self-controlled, renounce the fruits-of-all-actions.

श्रेयोहिज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्ध्यानंविशिष्यते।
ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम्॥१२-१२॥
Knowledge is indeed better than practice ; meditation is better than knowledge ; renunciation of the fruits-of-actions is better than meditation ; peace immediately follows renunciation.
Could there by easier path other than what the Lord has propounded above?

I want to take a small digression into Sreemadbhaagavatam, to drive home an important point. There is a famous story of GajaendramOksham inBhaagavatam. When the elephant got caught by the crocodile, he prays very fervently to LordVishNu. In that anguish he even starts doubting whether LordvishNu really exists. Though vishNucomes ultimately to protect the elephant, the elephant has his own doubts about the veryexistence of God. "*It is said that He exists for destitutes, He is there at the beckoning of paramaYogis, He is all pervading, if that is indeed so, why is He not saving me? Does he exist at all*?"

Whenyou go ahead in Bhaagavatam and reach Prahlaadacharitram, that boy Prahlaada did not have aniota of doubt and was absolutely certain about the existence of the God NaraayaNa. When hisfather challenges him to show the God Almighty, Prahlaada assures his father and asks him tocheck for himself, the existence of God in any object around. From the position of the elephantwith doubt, to the position of confident Prahlaada, lot of research must have happened in thearena of spirituality. Our sages wrote much of the Vedic literature corraborating this aspect. Inmy view Bhagavad Gita is one of the conformative reference works in this direction.

Now coming back to Bhagavad Gita, after God Almighty apprises Arjuna of the path to salvationthroughBhakti and devotion, He lets Arjuna to have a righteous path for absolute knowledge interms of do's and don'ts by giving examples of three types of behaviour, three types of humannature and three types of human qualities. When one has this self realisation, he would not befar from realising the God Almighty Himself (15th Adhyaya: Purushottama Praapti Yoga).

The last level covers Adhyaya 16 to 18. Let us have another digression now. Goddess Parvati beseeches Lord Siva to let her know asingle name of Lord Vishnu by chanting which, one gets the full benefit of chanting the 1000names of the God. Siva replies that chanting the name of Sri Rama is equivalent to chanting the1000 names. Similarly, there is one Mahaa-vaakyam 'Om tat sat' in the 17th chapter 23rd sloka:

ॐतत्सदितिनिर्देशोब्रह्मणस्त्रिविधःस्मृतः।
ब्राह्मणास्तेनवेदाश्चयज्ञाश्चविहिताःपुरा॥१७ -२३॥

From the beginning of creation, the three words 'OM', 'TAT' and 'SAT' were used toindicate the Supreme Absolute Truth. These three symbolic representations were used bybrahmanhas while chanting the hymns of the Vedas and during sacrifices.

In three syllables, God Almighty gives the essence: Truth is God, God is Truth. Thisis followed by the final chapter Mokshasanyaasa Yoga which is the ultimate one in the field ofspirituality. The 65th Sloka is

मन्मनाभवमद्भक्तोमद्याजीमांनमस्कुरु।
मामेवैष्यसिसत्यंतेप्रतिजानेप्रियोऽसिमे॥१८ -६५॥

Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisancesto Me and worship Me. I promise you that you will come to Me without fail.

Note here the slightdifference in the Sloka that we referred to in the 9th Adhyaya.

मन्मनाभवमद्भक्तोमद्याजीमांनमस्कुरु।
मामेवैष्यसियुक्त्वैवमात्मानंमत्परायणः॥९-३४॥

Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.

From *being completely absorbedin Me, surely you will come to Me*" mentioned in 9thAdhyaya, it has now got changed into "*I promise you that you will cometo Me without fail*"in 18trh Adhyaya. When God Almighty promises, would there be any thing one could aspire for?That is what happens to Arjuna. He surrenders completely

नष्टोमोहःस्मृतिर्लब्धात्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत।
स्थितोऽस्मिगतसन्देहःकरिष्येवचनंतव॥१८ -७३॥

Arjuna said: *O infallible one, by Your grace my delusion hasbeen dispelled and I regained my senses and knowledge. All my doubts havegone, and Iwill do whatever you desire.*

BhagavadGita ends there but for a few concluding Slokas of Sanjaya.One has to transport on the mental plane to the battle field of Kurukshetra and completelyvisualise himself or herself to be a part there to understand the full meaning of Bhagavad Gita.And believe me it is possible and you will enjoy each and every sloka of the celestial text.Such great knowledge isgiven by the Parama Guru, or Jagadguru.

Who is that Jagadguru?

वसुदेवसुतंदेवं, कंसचाणूरमर्दनम्।
देवकीपरमानंदं, कृष्णंवंदेजगद्गुरुम्॥
My salutations to Him.